

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder & the College Student

Not all psychological diagnoses that cause educational difficulties stem from purely biological or genetic causes, and not all are present for an individual's entire life. Stress and anxiety, for example, are potential problems caused by environmental factors that affect an individual's life. These may occur only at certain times in response to certain stimuli. Although stress is a natural part of college that nearly all students will experience, sometimes it can be more than simply being nervous about a deadline or an upcoming exam. Sometimes that stress may be caused by something entirely outside the university setting, and be something much more serious, such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

Post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, is classified under the umbrella of anxiety disorders and is characterized by anxiety-related experiences, behaviors, and physiological responses that result after an exposure to a psychologically traumatic event. Symptoms can appear shortly after the event or sometimes months later, but to move the diagnosis from one of [acute stress disorder](#) to PTSD, symptoms must persist for more than 30 days, and they must create difficulties in one or more important areas of life function.

➤ Embed Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQ5v4YYafL4>

Which traumatic events may lead to PTSD may vary widely and differ from individual to individual. For example, if two friends are mugged in an alley, one may suffer from PTSD while the other may experience little to no problem coping with the event. However, in a different situation, such as sexual assault, the outcomes could potentially be reversed. Although most people (50-90%) encounter trauma over a lifetime, only about 8% develop full PTSD. ([Source](#)) Development of PTSD is often impacted by the individual's coping strategies, support network, and past experiences, although there is also evidence that a hereditary predisposition may exist ([source](#)).

One of the most talked about causes of PTSD today is military service. Among veterans of the Iraq and Afghan wars, the [prevalence of PTSD is currently 12.5%](#), an increase of 4.5% OVER the general population. Because symptoms may not present for months, or even years later, these numbers are expected to rise. Among [Vietnam War veterans](#), about 15% of men and 9% of women were found to have PTSD at the time of a study conducted 1983, while approximately 30% of men and 27% of women reported as having had PTSD some point following their time in Vietnam. This may have considerable implications for the field of higher education; with the passing of the post-9/11 [GI Bill](#), there has been an increase in the number of Iraq/Afghan War veterans who are able to attend, and in fact do attend college. In the 2009-2010 academic year, a total of [270,666 veterans](#) began using their GI Bill benefits.

When it comes to the college setting, PTSD presents some very serious problems. For some, it may be difficult to be around people and to attend larger classes, take exams in a crowded room, be enrolled full-time, or, as is common in combat veterans, deal with common noises and stimuli present on a college campus. Also, those with PTSD often have co-morbid insomnia and/or depression, which may cause concurrent issues such as the inability to focus in class and maintain motivation. However, it is

very important to note that PTSD does not mean that these students have any less ability to excel in their academics.

Accommodations can easily be made to help these students achieve academic success. Students can be allowed to take online only classes where possible, have classes recorded when feasible, or take classes with a lower enrollment. They can be given quiet study options, be allowed to take tests alone, and even be allowed to leave early to avoid crowds. The accommodations depend on individual circumstances and the aspects of the trauma that has occurred.

Treatment of PTSD centers on therapy, both individual and group, as well as the use of medication to ease symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and insomnia. The prognosis for PTSD, like most aspects of the diagnosis, varies. For example, a [study](#) of survivors of the Holocaust and WWII Veterans found that 30-40 years later, most individuals had occasional nightmares and flashbacks, but most were emotionally stable. This varies by individual and severity of the trauma.

If you know a student who you suspect is having issues with a PTSD diagnosis, or would like more information about the diagnosis and what you can do to help students, please contact the Veteran's Services Office at the Palomar College Campus. Information is provided below:

Veteran's Services Office

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| Location | Located in the Student Services Center at the San Marcos Campus. Click here for the campus map Veteran's Services Palomar Community College 1140 West Mission Road San Marcos CA 92069-1487 |
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Click [here](#) for driving directions

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| Office Hours | Mon-Thur 7:30am - 6pm Friday 7:30am - 2pm |
| Telephone | (760) 744-1150, ext. 2173/2174 |
| Email | veterans@palomar.edu |

Veteran's Resource Center

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| Location | SU-22 located behind the Student Union (SU) building. Click here for the campus map |
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| Office Hours | Mon-Thur 8:00am - 6pm Fri 8:00am - 2pm |
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| Telephone | (760) 744-1150, ext.2827 |
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